

Hooked on Ultimacy

In his stimulating article "Ultimate Meaning" (2/19), Fr. Robert Johann seized upon some writings of mine to take issue with those he calls the "new" pragmatists. Had I only said what he correctly attributed to me, or put my case in terms as bald as he might lead many to think, I would be open to the kinds of objections he raises. The article of mine I assume he had in mind was "The Secular City" (*Commonweal*, 9/17/65), a discussion of Harvey Cox's book of the same name. Though I can now see how some badly phrased sentences in that article may have led Fr. Johann to classify me as anti-philosophical, I was by no means suggesting that we do away with philosophy. Nor would I have mankind do away with "vision, imagination and reflection" (Dewey). And heaven forbid that we should concentrate exclusively on the natural and social sciences.

My real target was what I take to be a traditional Catholic *obsession* (that was the word I used) with ultimacy. Like Fr. Johann, I have profited from reading Dewey, but especially from Dewey's strictures against the "quest for certainty." The consequence of this obsession, I believe, is that Catholics have a low tolerance for the provisional, the tentative, the experimental. If all Catholics were as willing as Fr. Johann to give the words "ultimate meaning" the sense he does, I would have no problem. But are they? My own impression is that they are still looking for that "Super Reality" of which Fr. Johann spoke, and which, I take it, attracts him as little as it attracts me.

It is symptomatic that one can read some of the greatest Catholic theologians of our day—the Rahners, Küngs, Schillebeeckxs—and find only the scantiest references to the actual probings of science. I don't want to substitute scientific meanings for philosophical meanings. I only want to see some clear evidence that Catholic thought is really taking the sciences seriously. Otherwise, our philosophical reflections are apt to be abstractions building upon abstractions.

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The New Puritanism

While parts of "Schema 14" referred to in your Comment of Feb. 26 are "beautiful and moving," your praise was too indiscriminate. I look upon it as a great danger

that certain bishops are going to refuse titles and eschew the appearance of importance in dress and insignia.

This denial of the necessary categories of any hierarchy is a revival of Puritanism. What has happened distressingly often as an unintended by-product of Vatican II is a tendency on the part of the vocal and the meddling to force everyone into a single mold. The new passion for equality (much misunderstood) has turned into a kind of leveling, a new and worse kind of conformity. The self-styled liberal has become far more dogmatic than yesterday's arch-conservative would have dreamed of being.

Hierarchy is indigenous to reality. Leaders and followers there will always be; and the form of such a relationship suggests the meaning. It is time for some gifted novelist to write the spiritual equivalent of 1984. If only Evelyn Waugh were in his twenties.

JOSEPH SCHWARTZ
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Books for Everyman

May I suggest to Paul K. Cuneo that there are other straws in the wind as to directions Catholic book publication might, with profit, take than those mentioned in "Trends in Catholic Publishing" (2/19)?

Robert E. Kavanaugh, in discussing campus agnostics (1/22), cites the "need of literature someplace between Conway's *Question Box* and Rahner's lofty but valuable investigations." He deplores books that are "intelligible only to the elect." The same need that he feels for books and other aids that can "translate the faith into terms and activities [college] students can comprehend and enjoy" is felt in almost every parish where Catholic reading is being promoted. The man in the pew, too, has trouble with the "inbred terminology and mode of presentation" of most of our Catholic books.

I receive repeated requests for lists of books "that can be read without needing a dictionary every time you turn the page"; or "that Mom and Dad can read with *understanding*, so they can discuss with their children the growing pains of the Church." Often I am asked: "Why are ordinary housewives and the blue collar workers being neglected? What can I offer them?"

I pass the question on to Mr. Cuneo. How many Catholic books on various aspects of aggiornamento at present being extensively reviewed, advertised and recom-

mended in *AMERICA* and other Catholic periodicals are comprehensible to a reader who may have an adequate secular education but lacks a basic theological and philosophical vocabulary and is largely unfamiliar with Church history and many aspects of religious thought and discussion?

John L. McKenzie, S. J., in *The Power and the Wisdom* states that St. Paul wrote for *everyone* in the Church. When will our intellectuals deign to do likewise? When will our publishers give us such books?

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No Consensus

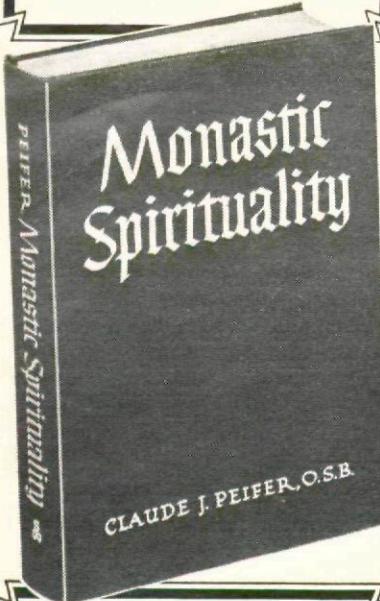
To my knowledge, no systematic investigation has been made of the popular reaction to the New Confraternity Version of the Epistles and Gospels read at Mass. Possibly such an investigation would verify your statement ("Call for a New Translation," 2/19) that there appears to be a "near consensus that the Gospel pericopes as now read are altogether infelicitous."

I should like to point out, however, that the "torrent of letters and much discussion" on which that statement is based do not tell the whole story. I have seen all the letters sent to the National Office of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and many of those sent to individual members of the translation board; they cannot accurately be called a torrent, but they are numerous enough to allow one to draw a different conclusion from that of your editorial.

Several bishops, including a cardinal whose pastoral and liturgical concern is well known, officers of the Liturgical Conference, and a large number of laymen have given favorable estimates of the translation. An Episcopalian scholar who is professor of New Testament at a large Eastern seminary describes himself as "deeply and most favorably impressed" with the readings of the Lectionary. Many of those who have judged the version favorably have done so in respect to its suitability for public liturgical reading as well as for its scholarly accuracy; on that point, the remarks of Dom Kevin Seasoltz in *Liturgical Arts* 33 (1964-65), p. 36, are interesting.

I am not concerned here with the truth of these favorable judgments; I simply point to them as indicating that the opposite views may be quite far from a "near consensus." It would be tiresome to repeat that the translators of the Confraternity Version

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—KENNETH SCOTT LATOURETTE,
Sterling Professor of Missions and
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are aware that it needs revision and that they are grateful for the many constructive criticisms they have received.

In respect to the Revised Standard Version, so highly regarded by the writer of the editorial, I should like to say only that in my opinion the "Catholic edition" of that version contributes little to the ecumenical movement. The changes that have been introduced in that edition, presumably to make the version acceptable to Catholics, are unnecessary and unfortunate. In the original RSV, Matthew 1:19 reads "divorce," the same word used in the Confraternity version; the Catholic edition reads "send [her] away." For some odd reason, the "brothers" of Jesus become his "brethren"; presumably the archaic term is thought less likely to be understood as meaning blood brothers. "Sisters" remains unchanged; so, too, does the problem. The ecumenical advantages of a version in which these and similar changes have been made on the grounds that they seemed "absolutely necessary in the light of Catholic tradition" (Introduction, p.xi) are at best questionable.

When the Confraternity Version is completed, it will represent the combined work of both Protestant and Catholic scholars, and will come closer than any other existing English version to the ideal of a common Bible. That, I think, will give a greater "psychological boost" to the ecumenical movement than the adoption by Catholics of a translation made by Protestant scholars in which Catholic collaboration consists of little more than making minor changes with which many Catholic scholars would not agree.

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Sacrilegious Intercommunion

Did the linotypist drop two lines of type, and did the proofreader doze? It seems inconceivable that any of your editors could have written ("Exploring Intercommunion," 2/26): "Baptism certainly qualifies every Christian to partake of the Eucharistic body of the Lord," without adding something on the necessity of the sacrament of penance for those above the age of reason whenever mortal sin has been committed.

Unless this comment is correctly rewritten, it opens the door to an unimaginable number of sacrilegious Holy Communions.

REV. THOMAS S. HANRAHAN
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Corpses on View

I utterly disagree with any interpretation of my essay on Brazil that would lead to a castigation of the former editors of *Brasil Urgente* or of others to whom you refer ("Leaders with Vision," 2/26) as "undis-

cerning" in an "espousal of Marxist catchwords and programs."

The suppression of *Brasil Urgente* and of other sectors of the Brazilian Catholic and non-Catholic left was an act of brutality by a military regime that used the cry of "communism" as a pretext for seizing power. That regime rules Brazil today, and, while it can quote the ciphers of increased foreign investment, it cannot hide the corpses of its own people.

DAVID E. MUTHLER, S.J.
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Just Plain People of God

Boundaries can be limiting or liberating. It seems to me that they would be undesirably limiting if we accept as merely temporary the role of the "prophetic priests," suggested in "Prophets to the World" (2/12). The goal of full stature for the layman as Christian prophet in and through the "secular" need not, it seems to me, exclude a similar role for the priest or religious.

The important thing, as Fr. John Padberg noted in the same issue (p. 227), is to get the ideas "off the pages of encyclicals or conciliar documents and into the world of choice and deed." In this endeavor, function should depend primarily on personal time and talent rather than lay or clerical state.

I am afraid that by overemphasizing *secular* and *sacred* we may simply move from horizontal to vertical apartheid. Let's be just people-of-God.

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The Last Judgment on Films

Anent your comment ("Catholic Film Awards," 2/19) on the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures awards to *Darling* and *Juliet of the Spirits*, it's the same old "artistic vision and human values" plug.

You say: "The distinguished committee of critics who selected them thought the merits of the values outweighed the reservations the film office had had about details of their presentation in classifying them." In other words: "Forget the strict adherence to the Ten Commandments if they get in the way of art and human (human is right!) values. They're only God's laws interpreted by religious leaders down through the ages. *We critics* are wiser."

How wonderful to be so original-sin free as these critics. I have plenty to account for in the final judgment. But I'm glad that in this motion picture classification and recommendation business there won't be anything for me personally to try to explain away to the Author of the Ten Commandments.

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